

Think beyond Thanksgiving pies with canned pumpkin

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Let's talk about one of the season's most iconic vegetables – canned pumpkin.

Yes, canned, because that's how 99 percent of us get our pumpkin. Which is fine except for one thing - Americans overwhelmingly associate canned pumpkin with just one dish (pumpkin pie) and one day of the year (Thanksgiving). But canned pumpkin actually has all sorts of uses in the kitchen, no matter what the season.

Pumpkin puree's rich flavor and creamy sweetness work great in both sweet and savory dishes. While we are so busy topping our pies with whipped cream, we have forgotten what a nutritional bargain this bulbous squash actually is, packing tons of fiber and vitamins. And while it is naturally sweet, 1 cup has only about as much sugar as milk.

One good part about canned pumpkin's association with Thanksgiving... It often goes on sale this time of year. Since it stores so well, this is the time to stock up. (True story: I just used my final can of pumpkin from last fall this week in order to make today's recipe.)

Some of my favorite uses for pumpkin puree include:

- Stirring 1/2 cup into brownie or chocolate cake batter to add nutrients and moisture.
- Adding 1/4 cup to smoothies for creaminess and vitamins.
- Slimming down baked goods by swapping out part of the fat for pumpkin puree.
- Whisking a bit into stews or chilies for added richness and depth.
- Layering it with Greek yogurt, bananas, maple syrup and granola for a super-charged morning breakfast parfait.
- Blending it with coffee, milk and spices for a homemade fall latte.

And let's not forget that pumpkin is, after all, a squash. Why not consider making a pumpkin puree soup? No laborious peeling and cubing needed! The sweet flavor pairs perfectly with spices, but feel free to use pumpkin puree in any of your favorite winter squash soup recipes.

PUMPKIN PEANUT CURRY BISQUE

Start to finish: 25 minutes Servings: 4

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil (or coconut oil)
1 small yellow onion, chopped (about 3/4 cup)
4 cloves garlic, chopped
1 small Yukon gold potato, peeled and cubed (1-inch cubes)
1 Granny Smith apple, peeled, cored and cubed (1-inch cubes)
3 tablespoons Thai red curry paste
2 cups reduced-sodium chicken stock or vegetable stock
1 cup water, plus more if needed
15-ounce can pumpkin puree
3 tablespoons smooth peanut butter
Salt and ground black pepper
Chopped fresh mint or cilantro, to serve



In a large saucepan over medium, heat the oil. Add the onion and cook until tender, but not brown, about 5 minutes. Add the garlic, potato, apple and curry paste. Cook, stirring constantly, until the curry paste is very fragrant, about 3 minutes. Increase the heat to high, add the stock and 1 cup of water.

Once the liquid boils, reduce the heat to medium-low, partially cover the pan, then let the soup cook until the potato and apple are very tender, about 15 minutes.

Remove the pan from the heat and let cool slightly. Stir in the pumpkin and peanut butter. Working in batches, transfer the soup to a blender and puree until smooth, about 1 minute. The texture should be like heavy whipping cream. If the soup is too thick, whisk in a bit of water. Season with salt and pepper. Divide between 4 serving bowls and top with mint or cilantro.

Nutrition information per serving: 250 calories; 120 calories from fat (48 percent of total calories); 13 g fat (2 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 0 mg cholesterol; 28 g carbohydrate; 7 g fiber; 10 g sugar; 8 g protein; 770 mg sodium.